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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 MADRID 000382

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EUR/FO FOR FARAH PANDITH
EUR/PGI FOR IVAN WEINSTEIN

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TAGS: [KISL](#) [PGOV](#) [SCUL](#) [OVIP](#) [OPRC](#) [SP](#)
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR MUSLIM OUTREACH COORDINATOR FARAH
PANDITH

REF: 2006 MADRID 2982

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Classified By: DCM Hugo Llorens for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Your visit to Madrid is a welcome opportunity to broaden our knowledge of and relations with the Islamic community in Spain. In your meetings with community leaders, private citizens, and government officials, we believe you will take away an impression that the large and growing Spanish Islamic community is quite distinct from those in other European nations, as is the Spanish approach to managing this intersection of cultures and religions. The legacy of Al-Andalus permeates both Spanish and Arab appreciation for Iberia's multicultural heritage in almost completely Roman Catholic Spain. However, recent years of immigration from North Africa and more recently from sub-Saharan Africa, as well as the March 11, 2004 terrorist attacks, have spurred some xenophobia and prejudice against Islamic immigrants. The Spanish economic and social system does not promote upward mobility and cultural assimilation to the same extent as the United States, and polling data provide a mixed picture of Muslims' opinions of their lot in Spain. Immigration is one of the most important themes in Spanish politics today, although Islamic immigrants are merely a part of the debate, not the sole focus. The trial of 29 individuals for the March 11, 2004 Madrid train bombings will be ongoing during your visit.
END SUMMARY.

//LARGE MUSLIM COMMUNITY, VAGUE STRUCTURE//

12. (C) Unscientific estimates place the Muslim population in Spain at somewhere between 700,000 and 1.5 million. The Islamic Junta, a national Muslim association headed principally by Spanish converts to Islam, claims that the population is approaching one million (or 2.5 percent of the general population). However, the Muslim population in Spain is unquestionably growing. The largest group of Muslims in Spain are Moroccan immigrants, comprising perhaps as much as half of the total Muslim population. Populations are present from every Arab nation, as well as from Southern and Central Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. The Ministry of Justice's "Registry of Religious Entities" contains approximately 384 Muslim organizations nationwide.

13. (C) While Spain boasts a large Muslim community, it lacks a coherent organizational structure and hierarchy. Several organizations, including the Islamic Junta, are vying for

preeminence as the national representatives of the Islamic community. Two organizations - the Spanish Federation of Islamic Religious Entities (FEERI) and the Union of Islamic Communities in Spain (UCIDE) together form the Spanish Islamic Commission (CIE), which the government has worked with as a legitimate representative of Islam in Spain. The CIE is affiliated with the Muslim Council on Cooperation in Europe (CMCE). However, the leadership of both FEERI and CIE is not representative of the largely North African/Moroccan Muslim population in Spain. Perhaps the most representative group is the Association of Moroccan Workers and Immigrants in Spain (ATIME), although it is not a religious organization. The largest Islamic community center in Madrid, known colloquially as the "M-30 mosque" is funded by Saudi Arabia and is decorated throughout with pictures of Mecca provided by the Bin Laden Group.

//HISTORIC LEGACY OF AL-ANDALUS//

¶4. (U) Spain is not new to the clash between west and east. From approximately 800 C.E. to 1200 C.E., the Islamic Caliphate of Al-Andalus dominated much of the Iberian peninsula. The kingdom of Al-Andalus has a historical reputation in both the Islamic and the Christian world for having been a groundbreaking example of religious tolerance and cultural interaction - including a substantial Sephardic Jewish community. The Muslim and Jewish presence in Spain held on until 1492, when Spain united under Queen Isabel and King Fernando, who set in motion the persecution and expulsion non-Catholic populations from Spain. In the 21st century, Spanish appreciation of its multicultural heritage has grown considerably, notably under the current government, which has supported the opening of "Casa Sefarad/Israel" and "Casa Arabe", two international/cultural centers dedicated to these two once prominent communities in Spain.

¶5. (C) Indeed, Spain has almost mythologized its

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multicultural past, even though it took place under the Muslim domination of the country and has not existed in Spain since 1492. It is trying to use this myth positively, however, to promote Spain as a crossroads of cultures and to foster tolerance. Jewish organizations have sought to increase public awareness of and financial support for Jewish historical landmarks throughout Spain's oldest cities. Many of Spain's most impressive buildings and tourist sites were originally constructed by Muslims in Al-Andalus, including the Alhambra in Granada and the Great Mosque in Cordoba. The Cordoba Mosque (still known as "la mezquita", the Spanish word for Mosque) was converted into a cathedral soon after the reign of Isabel and Fernando (the "Catholic Kings") and is now the subject of controversy over Muslim desire to pray there once more.

//POLLING DATA ON MUSLIM ATTITUDES//

¶6. (C) During 2006 at least three major polls were conducted on Islam in Spain, and they revealed an apparent gap in mutual understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims. The first, a poll of 1500 Muslims by Metroscopia for the Ministry of Interior, found that 31 percent of Muslims felt well-integrated in Spain, 49 percent felt fairly well-integrated, and 19 percent were not well-integrated. Eighty-three percent of respondents said they had encountered no obstacles to practicing their religion, while 13 percent had difficulty. Fifty-seven percent of respondents believed Spanish society was tolerant of their religion while 37 percent said they faced some prejudice.

¶7. (C) A poll conducted by Christian magazine 21RS in October 2006 found that two-thirds of Muslims had problems integrating in Spain and 70 percent were having difficulties reconciling their faith with life in a western democracy.

¶8. (C) However, the Pew Global Attitudes Project conducted a

poll of Spaniards during the summer of 2006 which found that only 29 percent of respondents held a good opinion of Islam. In response to a separate question, 83 percent of respondents associated "Muslim" with "fanaticism." 58 percent of respondents felt that being a devout Muslim was incompatible with modern society, and 41 percent of respondents believed that at least some of the country's Muslims were supporting Islamic extremism. Eighty percent of respondents felt that Islam did not respect women. (COMMENT: This last result may reflect a degree of Spanish hypocrisy, as Spain has a very serious gender violence problem which is completely unrelated to Islam. END COMMENT.)

//IMMIGRATION//

19. (C) Immigration to Spain is a new phenomenon, and its fast growth is one of Spain's most challenging social problems. In Spain, roughly one person in ten is an immigrant at present; the estimated legal immigrant population in 2006 was 3.9 million, with perhaps one to two million more clandestine immigrants. Moroccans are the largest immigrant group in Spain, though they are followed closely by populations from Ecuador, Romania, the UK, Bulgaria, Bolivia and the United Kingdom. Polling has shown that immigration has been the most or the second most important issue for Spaniards over the past two years. Spaniards perceive immigrants to be a risk for either taking jobs from Spaniards or taking social services without working and sticking Spanish taxpayers with the bill. The practice of different religions, not just among Arabs but also Sub-Saharan African migrants, only serves exacerbate this xenophobia. However, polling data and embassy experience do not show a direct relationship between Islamophobia and immigration. A February 2007 poll by Eurobarometer found that one in three Spaniards viewed immigration as the biggest challenge facing Spain, while only five percent were concerned with the need to integrate foreign populations.

//INTEGRATION EFFORTS//

10. (C) It would be a stretch to say that the Spanish government is succeeding where other European governments have failed in their integration efforts. Nevertheless, the need for Muslim integration is a fairly recent phenomenon in Spain, and to the government's credit it has recognized the problem and has begun to take steps to address it. For example, in 2006 the Islamic Commission joined with the government in producing a standard textbook on Islam, the

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first of its kind in Spain, to be used in religion classes on Islam nationwide. The government funds religion teachers who teach Islam in Spanish public schools, although the Islamic community has complained that the number of students seeking classes in Islam far outstrips the number of teachers available. More controversially, the government has allowed Morocco to send teachers to Spain to provide classes in Islam for Moroccan immigrant students. The government has also worked to increase access for Muslim prisoners to imams. Muslim leaders complain that they face bureaucratic hurdles from the government in creating places of worship or gaining permits to construct new mosques; however, government officials have suggested that the community's problems are more due to lack of funds than government obstruction.

//EXTERNAL INFLUENCE: MOSQUES AND COMMUNITY CENTERS//

11. (C) Foreign nations have stepped up to fill funding gaps for the Islamic community in Spain. The M-30 mosque is funded by the Saudis and Sheiks from several Arabian nations have provided or are providing support for Islamic institutions and/or new mosques in Spain. However, the Moroccan population has made do largely by creating many neighborhood "garage mosques" and community centers of necessity wherever they have found space. Community leaders in many of Spain's larger cities, including Barcelona,

Malaga, Sevilla, and Cordoba, are working diligently to secure land and approval to create larger and more public places of worship. They have generally faced bureaucratic hurdles, funding shortfalls, and not-in-my-backyard resentment from Spaniards. However, these disputes have for the most part played out in government institutions and the media. Incidents of overtly racist or xenophobic actions against the Islamic population have been uncommon. In 2006 vandals defaced a mosque/community center in Cordoba with graffiti including swastikas.

¶12. (C) The Muslim community in Spain is not organized politically and lacks many identifiable leaders. Muslim organizations tend to be small and populated largely by Spanish converts to the religion. There is little Muslim media to speak of, outside of small papers and "Web Islam", a website run by the Islamic Junta.

//ISLAMIST EXTREMISM - MARCH 11 TRIAL//

¶13. (C) The trial of the 29 suspects in the March 11 Madrid train bombings will coincide with your visit. The trial has captured the attention of the Spanish media outlets, which alternately have criticized the government's handling of the case or propagated conspiracy theories about the true authors of the attacks. The trial could run into the summer, and it is not entirely certain how many suspects will be convicted and for how long. The total potential jail sentence for the suspects totals in the hundreds of thousands of years.

¶14. (C) Spain has become increasingly aware of and concerned by the growth of Islamist extremism in North Africa. Ceuta and Melilla, Spain's two enclaves on the North African coast, have a significant Muslim population and have come under considerable scrutiny amid reports that Moroccan and Algerian extremists are infiltrating and operating in Spain. Spanish authorities continue to make fairly regular arrests of persons suspected of participating in or supporting terrorist plots. Embassy will provide a more thorough brief upon your arrival in Madrid.

//ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS PROJECT//

¶15. (C) Along with Turkey, the Zapatero government proposed the creation of an international forum, the "Alliance of Civilizations" to serve as a venue for cultural, social and political interchange among western and eastern governments. This proposal has received mild praise from Arab and some Asian governments (and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) but a lukewarm reception in Europe and the U.S., in part due to its cross-cutting with the G-8's BMENA initiative. Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan declined Zapatero's offer to head the Alliance, and it remains unclear what the future of this initiative will be. Secretary Rice sent a letter to FM Moratinos last year expressing support for the Alliance and we have pledged to provide 100,000 dollars for a specific project once specific projects are identified. We agreed to this effort after Moratinos gave one million dollars to BMENA.

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//EMBASSY EFFORTS//

¶16. (C) In 2005, Embassy Madrid launched its Muslim outreach program, and we have continued it through 2006 and 2007. Highlights have included a visit by Abdul al Kepsi of the National Endowment for Democracy and later by Imam Bashir Arafat as part of the Citizen Diplomat program, Ambassadorial visits to the M-30 Mosque, a widely praised Iftar hosted by the Ambassador, dinners with Arab/Muslim Ambassadors and promotion of Muslim IV program participants. Our current strategy, outlined in ref A, continues these efforts under the executive direction of the DCM and the coordination of the Public Affairs and Political Section. We have also created an inter-agency Mission Working Group to review our

outreach efforts. The Mission's strategy prioritizes the inclusion of prominent Muslim representatives in a wider variety of Embassy functions and events, not just those focused on Muslim outreach. Mission efforts are currently focused on developing contacts in Madrid and other regions, building institutional memory and gathering relevant information from government sources and Islamic organizations. We are exploring opportunities to send officers into schools with Muslim populations to both work with students in English and give talks on the U.S. integration model. This effort will also be extended to the Embassy's youth webpage. Public Diplomacy will organize quarterly dialogue events to bring together diverse members of the Spanish community. Opportunities for Political reporting on Muslim attitudes in Spain dovetail with the publication of both the International Religious Freedoms report and the Human Rights Report. The Political section reports extensively on Islamist extremism in Spain, immigration, counter-terrorism and other Muslim-outreach related issues. Spain will also host a conference in Cordoba on Islamophobia in the second half of 2007 as part of its chairmanship of the OSCE, and we hope to have Department participation at that conference.

//GENERAL BACKGROUND ON SPAIN//

¶17. (C) Spain's population is approximately 44 million. It is the world's eighth largest economy and a major world player in construction, fishing, manufacturing and tourism. The Spanish monarchy was restored in the 1970's after the death of dictator Francisco Franco, whose 40 year rule was preceded by an extremely bloody civil war in the 1930's. King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia are the heads of state, while President Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero is the head of government and of the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE), which swept into power in 2004 in the aftermath of the Madrid train bombings. The main opposition party is the conservative Popular Party (PP), whose current head is Mariano Rajoy. However, the moral and spiritual compass for the PP remains former President Jose Maria Aznar, who left office in 2004. The PP is much closer to the influential Catholic Church in Spain and has sternly criticized the PSOE government for its "accommodation" of immigrants. The PSOE has preached a line of tolerance and integration but has stumbled somewhat in both implementation and underestimation of the challenge of immigration. The next major political event in Spain is the regional and municipal elections, which will take place in May 2007. The nationwide general election is scheduled for March 2008. The key battleground political issues in Spain are terrorism (both Islamist and from domestic terrorist group ETA), immigration, the trans-Atlantic relationship, Spain's place in Europe, the economy, and corruption.

¶18. (C) Bilateral relations with Spain were greatly strained in 2004 when the Zapatero government hastily withdrew Spanish forces from Iraq. However, over the past two and a half years the relationship has recovered to normalcy, but not warmth. Spain is a leading participant in UNIFIL and also heads a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Afghanistan. It provides training for Iraqi security forces (in Spain), and has contributed peacekeepers in Congo, Kosovo, and Haiti. Spain hosts two vital U.S. military bases in Rota and Moron. It is a leading contributor in international aid and multilateral institutions and is a particularly strong supporter of the UN.

Visit Embassy Madrid's Classified Website;
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